

Participation in the Egyptian Pre-university Education Sector: International Organizations' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses participation in the pre-university education sector by reviewing three stakeholders: Local communities, the Boards of Trustees (BOTs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), their contributions to the sector, and their main challenges that prevent them from realizing more significant impacts from the perspectives of international organizations' officials. The paper adopts a qualitative method and builds on data gathered from semi-structured interviews with twelve international organizations' officials. The paper suggests that the lack of community participation has a lot of interactive factors within a very complex, complicated and demotivating context. It concludes with a set of recommendations that may be considered by the government of Egypt and the ministry of education for enhancing participation within the pre-university education sector.

Keywords: Boards of Trustees, Community Participation, Education Sector, International Organizations, NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses participation in the pre-university education sector by reviewing three main stakeholders: Local communities, the Boards of Trustees (BOTs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), their contributions to the sector, and their key challenges that prevent them from realizing more significant impacts from the perspectives of international organizations' officials.

Participation includes a wide range of processes and refers to “Spontaneous cooperation between people, their agreement to work together and to contribute actively to the choice and implementation of development projects and programs that help achieve society’s goals” (UNDP, 2003, Preamble, Para. P.4). Participation includes problem diagnosis and definition, information collection and analysis, priorities articulation and goal settings, resources assessment, programs deciding and planning, designing implementation strategies and apportioning responsibilities, programs management and progress monitoring (Shaeffer, 1994).

The World Bank (2002) states that:

International research and experience suggest that active participation and shared decision-making is much more likely to foster genuine ownership of reform programs. It is also likely to increase the possibility that solutions to local problems can be found at the local level (p. 48).

Both top-down and bottom-up approaches are used by policy-makers with the aim of improving accountability. Empirical research suggests that the effectiveness of the top-down approach is limited. Therefore, the bottom-up participatory approach has received increasing attention. Decentralization and school management are adopted to utilize the information advantage that communities possess regarding their children’s needs, harness their strong incentives to monitor the performance of teachers and principals, and make the best use of their comparative advantage in monitoring (Serra, D., Barr, A. & Packard, T. , 2011).

METHOD

This paper builds on qualitative data that were gathered mainly for my PhD thesis from semi-structured interviews that were conducted in English as

well as document analysis. All interviews were conducted in Cairo except one that was held in Upper Egypt.

Participants

Twelve international organizations' officials were interviewed, three from UN organizations and nine from international donor agencies; ten with an Egyptian background, one European and one Asian; seven women and five men. They had received educational credentials of high quality. All of them had at least a master's degree; 50% had completed their doctoral degrees at western universities; and four of them held the rank of a university professor.

For confidentiality, I transcribed the interviews myself. Names of the participants were changed in a systematic way without any reference to their real names, identifying information or their organizations of affiliation. After transcribing the interviews, transcripts were then sent back to participants to check for validity and verification. They were informed that it was completely up to them to add, delete, change or edit the transcript with the aim of improving and focusing their contributions. A final version of the transcripts was reached in the light of the received feedback.

RESULTS

Data gathered from different sources were categorized into the following main themes: Local Communities, the Boards of Trustees (BOTs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOS). More sub-themes were identified later.

I- Local Communities

According to the United Nations Development Programme Evaluation Office (2004):

International experience shows that the effectiveness of education can be enhanced through using community-driven changes appropriate to local opportunities for employment, productivity and life-skills - thus generating higher returns to education (pp. 4-5).

Similarly, the World Bank (2013) suggests that "communities tend to express greater satisfaction with decisions in which they participate, even when participation does not change the outcome or when outcomes are not consistent with their expressed preferences" (p. 10).

Thus, participation is important not only for increasing and mobilizing resources required for implementing educational reforms but also for its contribution to enhancing the level of satisfaction among communities and beneficiaries as it gives them the chance to take part in decision-making processes and get actively involved in governance and management of the education sector.

Recent trends in international projects in education show a participative approach by increasing the involvement of local stakeholders. International organizations and governments have to work harder to ensure greater cooperation at the local level as there are increasing expectation among communities and local governments they should be more involved in decision-making processes at all levels (International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), 1999). Thus, it can be argued that participation can enhance governance through empowering local communities and getting them more involved in decision-making. In other words, enhancing participation can impact governance positively.

Mba and Ongolo-Zogo (2010) state that:

Good governance includes institutional reforms for a better visibility of public initiatives, a greater sense of accountability of the leaders and the mobilization of management competences. The supporters of deconcentrated and decentralized powers think that good governance is justified by the fact that the communities are in total control of the management of social services (p. 4).

The Egyptian Ministry of Education (2007) seeks to develop the responsibilities and roles of local communities to become more involved in supporting education improvement especially at the school level. It aims at mobilizing the local capacity and resources for improving planning, organization, accountability and monitoring processes.

Local communities have contributed to several pilots, initiatives, and achievements to support the education sector; such as the Alexandria experiment and community schools that have been recognized by international organizations as successful practices.

The Alexandria Experiment

The Alexandria Experiment was launched after signing a memorandum of agreement among the MOE, the Governorate of Alexandria, the USAID, and the Alexandria Development Center (NGO) for implementing a pilot program that aimed at enhancing participation,

implementing advanced decentralized management, delegating authorities and responsibilities to the school level, and providing teachers and administrators with advanced training programs. In support of this initiative, the MOE delegated unprecedented authorities to the Governor of Alexandria. The initiative enabled the mobilization of community resources with a high degree of disbursement-flexibility for providing incentives for employees, purchasing equipment and furniture, enhancing education process and implementing awareness campaigns (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2004).

The success of that initiative in promoting decentralized decision-making and empowering local communities encouraged the MOE to implement similar initiatives in six other governorates, namely: Cairo, Fayoum, Beni Suef, Minia, Qena and Aswan (Hammad, 2012).

Unfortunately, the success of the Alexandria Experiment that was recognized by national and international stakeholders failed to be mainstreamed in other governorates and was not even sustained in Alexandria.

Community Schools

Community Schools represent a good example of effective community participation to the education sector in Egypt where local communities normally donate the land for building schools. Community schools aim at providing educational opportunities for the most deprived regions through utilizing a student-centered approach where teachers facilitate the educational process and adopt multi-level classes (Ministry of Education, 2002).

Since their inception in 1992, Community Schools supported by UNICEF have served disadvantaged areas and offered a second chance to dropouts and those not enrolled in primary education. They support learners and communities, provide suitable opportunities for girls, and demonstrate benefits for students and their families (Ministry of Education, 2014). In 2016/2017, the number of those schools reached 5000, accommodating 123,672 students; 89,439 girls and 34,233 boys (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Taking into consideration the whole context of community schools, they implement a number of facilitation and flexibility criteria. For example, they do not comply with the specifications defined for school-buildings; two facilitators from the local community work in those schools; learners do not pay expenses or commit to a school uniform; and the flexibility of hours to

allow learners to fulfill their personal and professional commitments and activities (NCERD, 2015).

Local communities are presented according to the following sub-themes: Weak Community Participation, An Environment for Success, and Community Participation Challenges.

Weak Community Participation

All participants agree that participation in the education sector is weak which negatively impacts its governance. Jack, for example, confirms the weak participation in the education sector though he is confident that donors will address this issue in their programs and projects. He states that:

I do not think there is enough participation from society into problems that face the Ministry of Education. This is my personal point of view. But I am sure that donors are working on this and they can avail opportunities for the public to participate in the decision-making as well at least at the local level.

Adam presents a very similar opinion suggesting that although community participation in Egypt is low, even when compared to other developing and neighboring countries, there is a potential opportunity to increase its level in the education sector. This opportunity can be understood in the light of the expansion of the NGOs' sector. Adam explains:

Participation is limited but growing. The bottom line we are talking about growing participation from civil society in education policy-making, but it is still limited relatively to other countries; even other developing and Arab countries. The number of organizations working on education is increasing.

Adam confirms the weakness of participation in Egypt and justifies it in the light of political and cultural aspects rather than economic ones. He suggests that the lack of participation can be better justified by the political and cultural environment:

In Egypt, I think the lack of participation is a tendency and related to the political and cultural aspects rather than economic aspects. My understanding is based on what happened after 2011. After 2011, there was unexpected level of participation in elections, constitutions and so on. So, the lack of participation is not actually related to

poverty because the revolution has not provided prosperity to Egypt up till now. The political and cultural environment of the revolution, surrounding what happened, I think gave people a motive to participate.

Sandy indicates that the lack of awareness of the public and local communities is a powerful factor that affects negatively the level of participation in the education sector suggesting that raising awareness of local communities regarding education, its importance and the change they can make in their schools will improve participation.

An Environment for Success

Adam implies there is no one single stakeholder or factor that makes the success of educational reforms. He explains the importance and elements of the supportive environment for enabling success. He gives the example of the “Alexandria Experiment”, where the efforts of different stakeholders interacted and led to its success. Success factors in Alexandria included: political leadership from the governor of Alexandria and educational leadership at the governorate level; partnership and contributions of international organizations, represented by the USAID through Education Reform Program (ERP), and the private sector; and participation of local communities, the BOTs and NGOs. Adam explains:

In Alexandria, we are talking about good political leadership, Abdel Salam Al-Mahgoub, was a very good governor and very popular at the same time. He had a very good relationship and a trust relationship with the private sector. The private sector put money in this and international organizations found the good raspy to go ahead and participate in this kind of initiatives. We talk about many success factors worked together at the same time. When you have leadership, motivated private sector, some ideas, packing from the international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society, you can talk about this. Lack of participation in Egypt is not embedded in the country. It depends on the circumstances. The experience of Alexandria is really a very good example of this. When you have the environment ready for this, people participate.

To clarify what he means by a successful environment, Adam uses the following metaphor: “When the success ingredients come together, you have a good dish”.

His perspective is in accordance with other participants' views that suggest that people become more involved, motivated and enthusiastic to participate in education when they realize there are serious efforts from different stakeholders; especially those emerging from the education sector.

Community Participation Challenges

There are several challenges that face the effective participation in the education sector emerged from the participants' perspectives and are presented according the flowing sub-themes: Poverty; Lack of Participation Culture; Lack of Motivation; Lack of Trust; and Barriers and Negative Participation.

Poverty

Egypt is not a poor country according to international standards and is ranked as a middle-income country by the World Bank. However, poverty continues to be a serious challenge (UNESCO, 2008). The national poverty rate has risen from 16.7 percent to 26.3 percent in 1999/2000 and 2012/2013 respectively. There is a great discrepancy among different geographic regions. In Upper Rural Egypt, for example, over half of the population live under the poverty line (Ministry of International Cooperation, 2016).

Poverty may be a strong factor in reducing the level of participation, but it does not prevent it totally. Even in governorates with high poverty rates, participation exists in different forms.

It seems that most participants have an agreement regarding poverty's negative impact on the level of participation. Participation may take different forms that do not always include the financial contributions. For example, in different governorates, people contribute to schools' maintenance activities with their own efforts and time.

Peter, for example, is convinced that poverty negatively impacts the level of participation. He suggests that enhancing participation in general requires financial resources. In response to a question on whether he thinks that poverty contributes to the weak participation to the education sector, he states that:

Yes, [poverty] contributes to the lack of participation. Setting up these dialogues, is time consuming and it is costly because you have to arrange places; you have to carry out outreach measures; you have to invite people; you have to inform people that this is taking place; and the information material has to be prepared. This is not something that anyone can do. The whole thing requires financial means.

This comes in accordance with the United Nations Development Programme Evaluation Office (2004) that suggests: “The very poor do not have a voice in official participation structures because they are too busy seeking out the means of survival” (p. 27).

Peter indicates that the poor are less likely to participate as they are more focused on addressing and fulfilling their own basic needs. Thus, participation is not a priority for the poor, as he suggests:

I think the extent to which people are eager to participate or engage in this type of processes is dependent on their income, on their capabilities. So, if you are struggling with your basic needs, and someone asks you to join the Boards of Trustees, you will say: “Sorry, I have better things to do”; which is understandable.

Suzanne confirms that poverty has a negative impact on participation stating that: “Definitely; poverty is an issue. Surely the more poverty, the less support to education you will find”.

Adam, however, suggests that the results of studies that explored the relationship between poverty and participation come inconsistent and could not show one single trend:

One of the main themes in development is the relationship between political development and economic development like the relationship between the level of participation and the standard of living and the poverty incidence and so on. Let’s say that the results of most empirical studies on this issue is mild. There is no trend saying that poverty will lead to lower participation because we have specific international experiences, in poor countries, but they have very active people in services like education, health and municipalities.

Adam’s opinion is in accordance with United Nations Development Programs (UNDP, 2003) that states: “Though the evidence is inconclusive, the low level of political participation would suggest that poverty is an obstacle to people having a proper voice in the decisions which affect their lives” (p. 49).

Nadia, also, indicates that poverty is not a barrier for the effective participation in the education sector, but the lack of awareness is. She refers to the importance of local communities’ awareness and commitment in enhancing participation in many positive ways.

It can be concluded that poverty is a barrier to participation in education, but it does not prevent it. Evidence from the ground demonstrates that even the poor contribute to the education sector in many ways. They can offer their time, efforts and skills to improve schools' environment, repair schools' furniture, conduct maintenance, and paint classrooms. However, they still need to be informed and given more chances and channels to participate.

Lack of Participation Culture

The lack of participation is justified by the lack of that culture as Ramzy suggests. He states that people tend to be more involved and engaged in education and educational services that are monitored and provided by the private sector, because they have to pay for those services. Consequently, they would like to make sure they pay in return for getting quality educational services.

Ramzy explains:

Participation is very poor because people do not have the culture to participate. It is the problem of free education. If you compare the public education with the private education, you will see because parents pay a big amount of money to private schools, they go and are very serious. There is also a bad tradition in public schools. When parents come, the school starts asking them for donation for improving the school and things of that sort. So, parents are very reluctant to go. You need to create a new culture and you need new ways to get people involved. If you listen to media or talk to any person on education, any person, they will criticize education and say: "What is this kind of education?". But these kinds of opinions go nowhere because there is no channel to receive or discuss this.

Ramzy explains that parents are more reluctant to participate in any school activities or attend any school events. They tend to keep away from participating in school activities such as the meetings of the BOTs, formerly Parents-Teachers Councils (PTCs), as in those meetings they are normally requested to donate funds to schools.

Mark also indicates that the lack of participation culture is a factor in reducing participation impact on the education sector, its governance and management; even with the existence of governance structures such as school boards. He asks: "How a citizen can participate effectively in the

schooling system? You have Boards of Trustees but still the culture it is not there. So, I see the level of participation is not that good”.

Lack of Motivation

Adam justifies the lack of participation in the education sector by the absence of a clear motivation. He suggests that people would be more engaged and involved if they witness that their contributions lead to real improvements and changes. He says:

I think participation is related to motivation. If people realize that their participation leads to change, they will participate. If the political environment gives them a message that your participation is indifferent and will not lead to a real change, people will respond by not to participate rather than insisting on that position. This is a difference between Egypt and other countries. In some other countries when you say your participation will not lead to change, this leads to more participation and more insistence on change. But in Egypt when people feel their participation is not counted so they do not voice and avoid.

Sarah gives a very similar point of view, suggesting that people are more motivated and interested in contributing to education reforms and initiatives when they see serious efforts exerted by the education sector at all its levels. She states that community efforts to support the education sector can take different forms such as supporting schools’ improvement plans, mobilizing resources, providing necessary equipment and materials and implementing school maintenance:

When the community sees serious initiatives from the school or from the Ministry that they want to do something that is really good for their children and starts to see good quality services provided for their children, they really support. In community schools, for example, they donate locations to the Ministry. In inclusive schools, they bring shadow teachers for disable children. They provide materials and extra resources for children with disabilities. They are willing to do anything for their children. They demonstrated that very well in all that they pay and invest in private tutoring.

Lack of Trust

One of the most serious challenges facing the education sector is the lack of trust among its different stakeholders. It is a phenomenon that can be clearly seen in almost every single aspect of the sector. Lack of trust within the sector is associated and justified by the lack of transparency; the lack of information, data and statistics; and the lack of data sharing and flow among different stakeholders.

Sarah blames the MOE for its inability to gain the trust of different stakeholders including communities and parents. She suggests that the MOE has to raise their awareness of reform efforts and get them more involved in consultations and decision-making processes. She argues:

If the government can really regain trust of the communities, people and parents, that it is really serious on doing something good for their children. The problems and weaknesses are all over the place. Everyone is talking about them. The good things are not as much, and no one talks about them even the Ministry. So, if they could publicize more on what they are trying to do, start involving parents and communities with them, start listening to them and having them as active partners, not just listening to them and then going and doing their own things, but really involving them and really strengthening good governance. When you give the community the responsibility of the school and ask them: “Please come and help us”, I think this will make a lot of difference.

Barriers and Negative Participation

Peter suggests various barriers that lower the effective participation in the education sector, suggesting that those barriers are not necessarily related to the political environment. He indicates that people may have different reasons for not participating including their avoidance of taking more burdens; their feeling that they lack the required capabilities; their inability to contribute in a meaningful way; insecurity to express their points of view; low income and the lack of education. As Peter sees it:

Participation is even hindered by things that have nothing to do with the political environment. If we are talking about city that is as huge as Cairo, and my commute is very long to the place or the school or wherever the Board of Trustees is going to meet, so this is going to hinder my participation. Sometimes people feel they will not be able to contribute anything meaningful. They may feel their capabilities

are not enough. They may feel insecure for expressing their views or articulating their ideas in such an open place. Sometimes if you have platforms that include people from different backgrounds, or that are meant to include people from different backgrounds, people from the lower income or have limited education might feel it is not their place. They will not be able to express their ideas in a proper way. They will say: “This is not for me. People will not take me seriously. People will laugh at me. This is not for me.

The UNDP (2003) describes the challenges facing participation in Egypt as follows:

There are other psychological and cultural obstacles facing participation, including the suspicion of government and all its related agencies, the suspicion of other individuals, complex and ambiguous laws, individualism, lack of initiative, the weakness of collective work, passivity, and indifference. These and other cultural and psychological features that are in contradiction with the culture of participation, hamper both local and human development (p. 66).

Nancy identifies the lack of coordination as a challenging area that the MOE should work on to enhance participation and maximize its impacts on the education sector when she states:

The participation of civil society in pre-university education sector is very important and promising. The efforts exerted by civil society and non-governmental organization are huge and cannot be ignored. The Ministry of Education can benefit from these efforts if it leads efforts towards better coordination.

Mary suggests that sometimes voices of communities, families and parents can have very negative impacts on education and its reforms. Those voices can be described as negative participation when they constitute strong resistance that undermines initiatives introduced by the MOE to reform the education sector and overcome its challenges. Mary states that:

Participation has also disadvantages in the sense that secondary education system needs to be reformed. It is a very flood system. However, even when the Ministry gets some good ideas and initiatives to try and reform that system, it is the people, families,

parents, citizens who obstruct the process. So, overall there is a very strong and powerful voice for people in education, but sometimes that voice is good and sometimes it is not.

II- The Boards of Trustees

The BOTs have an important role to play in the education reform strategy in Egypt. The principal rationale behind their establishment was to intensify the role of communities in the education reform. They have been envisioned as the vehicle through which a wide range of stakeholders can participate in educational planning, development, monitoring and the evaluation of the educational process (Education Reform Program, 2008).

The importance of the consistent approach between school and home could be influential on students' performance and that is why it is important to have parents' involvement in school activities. However, in Egypt, there are no regular and frequent meetings or class observation days (JICA, 2016).

After being piloted in collaboration with the USAID in seven governorates, the BOTs have been implemented all over the country. In 2005, the ministerial decree, No. 258 was issued to mainstream the BOTs in all Egyptian schools for increasing the involvement of different stakeholders in supporting the education sector, contributing to its governance and management, participating in decision-making processes, and enhancing monitoring of school processes and activities (Ministry of Education, 2005). However, the BOTs still face significant challenges to realize their desired goals towards empowering schools and enhancing their decision-making authority.

According to the Ministerial Decree No. 289 of 2011, regarding the reorganization of the BOTs, the school BOT is composed of thirteen members: five elected members representing students' parents; four public figures chosen by the Governor or a delegated representative; three teachers from the school elected by their colleagues; and the principal. The school BOT is responsible for realizing decentralization in management, monitoring, evaluation and decision-making processes; encouraging local and voluntary efforts to enhance community participation in supporting education; improving the educational process and overcoming its challenges; and fostering cooperation between parents and teachers (Ministry of Education, 2011).

The BOTs are presented through the following sub-themes: A Golden Opportunity; Impact; and The BOTs' Challenges.

A Golden Opportunity

BOTs play a significant role in providing advisory support to school management through bringing the communities, families, and experts closer to schools and developing an environment of trust and support to those schools from their local communities (UNESCO, 2008).

Despite facing several challenges in their implementation that undermine their purpose and roles, the BOTs are considered a real opportunity to move towards a more decentralized education sector through giving a voice to communities and families in education governance and management.

Jack describes the BOTs as a golden opportunity that can enhance community participation in the Egyptian pre-university education sector when he says:

The Boards of Trustees is a golden opportunity for participation from the communities and parents in the education process. It is not limited to the school level. Obviously, there are different levels of Boards of Trustees at the district level, the governorate level and the national level as well. I think this is the main avenue for citizen participation in the education system.

Mary stresses the importance of the BOTs in the Egyptian society and the education sector as they can contribute to improving the relationship between schools and families. Before the establishment of the BOTs, there were the Parents-Teachers Councils (PTCs) that were associated with the idea of inviting parents to schools mainly for collecting donations, which made parents reluctant to participate or even attend those meetings. Mary explains:

Boards of Trustees are good. The relationship between school, parents and families improved. Previously, parents and community members were afraid to go to schools because the moment they stepped in they were asked for money. Now there is this body and they have tried to work with it. It is doing well. They help schools with ideas, they participate in decisions-making. They help in school-improvement plans. They help schools towards accreditation. What is most important is that community feels they have a say in the school belonging to them.

Mary concludes that an effective leadership at the school level, represented in school principal, is very crucial for the successful implementation and effective contribution of the BOTs stating: “In order to have a good BOT, you must have a good school leader”.

In general, school principals, however, lack the necessary knowledge, the required professional capacities and the positive attitudes that enable them to take the initiatives they should (Rizk, 2016).

Impact

Suggesting that the authorities of the BOTs in Egypt are very limited, Hammad (2012) refers to the BOTs as “pseudo participation” where the focus is on activities related to supervising of school activities and resources mobilization. However, issues like policy design, curriculum development, staff hiring and firing, and textbooks design stay untouched to a great extent.

Many participants indicate that the BOTs have achieved several positive impacts within the education sector though there is still a huge room for improvement. Ramzy, for example, confirms the existence of good practices in some governorates in Upper Egypt and stresses the importance of identifying and spreading good practices and the remarkable achievements of the BOTs at their different levels. Those practices can represent guidance a model to follow. According to Ramzy:

I noticed some good practices in Qena, Luxor and Fayoum. However, the main challenge is how to get the best output of such a board. That is one thing. The other thing is to take their suggestions seriously and to authorize and delegate them. Give them responsibilities they can use to improve schools. If, for example, you have a good school, good district, or good governorate, you have to make these practices shine. You can say the Board of Trustees in this school has done this and this and because they did that the school improved and students are happy to go to this school. Look at that district, they are very good at strategic planning at the district level. That board managed to make that district number one in students’ achievement.

Mary suggests that the BOTs contribute to generating new ideas and concepts. She stresses the importance of raising awareness of local communities, families and parents and the positive effects this would have on education when she shares:

The Boards of Trustees raised some new ideas, some new concepts in the Egyptian society. People who are interested can be members in the Boards of Trustees. This is a governance body. A very important governance body. There are lots of contributions. Many people, individual citizens at micro level have raised interest in education. They are donating their time and money. They are building schools. Definitely, awareness is a factor, and education is a factor. Every family is suffering from the education system, so many individuals are motivated enough to try to help out if they can help out.

Jack suggests that the BOTs are important, however, they are not enough. He refers to the BOTs as one arm of the two arms of community participation at the local level. He states that community participation can be enhanced with the presence and involvement of the elected local councils that would provide more room for participation and open new windows for citizens to get their voices heard. He explains:

The BOTs are just one arm. Right now, we do not have elected councils at the local level. I think if this takes place, and I know the country in the process of doing this after doing this at the central level. If this takes place along with the BOT, I think there will be an available structure for citizens to vote their opinions and to voice their concerns and be heard at the local level. I think this is important. Right now, it is only the BOT and maybe it is not sufficient.

The Boards of Trustees' Challenges

There are several challenges hindering the effective implementation of the BOTs in Egypt including their weak roles, the lack of awareness forums that encourage parents and local communities to participate and support schools to realize their desired objectives. Some schools have not even activated the BOTs and do not participate in local community activities. Moreover, there is a lack of cooperation between the BOTs and other organizations to implement activities that benefit schools and a lack of using school buildings and resources to provide community services and activities (National Center for Examinations and Educational Evaluation) (NCEEE), 2015).

The participants identify a set of challenges that negatively affect the BOTs and their performance including scaling-up failure, the lack of effectiveness, the lack of incentives and monitoring, and the lack of awareness.

Scaling-up Failure

Mary refers to the inability of the MOE to scale-up successful pilots as one of the most serious issues that undermine the success of education reforms. She justifies the scaling-up failure by the lack of clear regulations, the lack of capacity, and the lack of financial resources. The BOTs are not an exception. The implementation of the BOTs was successful in some governorates such as Alexandria because of the availability of successful factors that are not necessarily available in other governorates. Mary suggests:

Scaling up is not only a problem for the BOTs. Scaling up is a problem for everything. Donors spend money on projects as pilots like the Alexandria BOT. That is one example, but they do not get scaled up because the Ministry does not know how to scale up. The Ministry needs capacity for scaling-up. In order to do that, you have to change the law. You need to change certain regulations and legislations. You need to have a budget. You need to have a scaling-up plan and the Ministry does not have the capacity for this. The BOTs are not scaled up and many other similar initiatives. It is because you have a model. The Ministry takes the model and puts it in a decree. This model was not created out of a decree. This was created out of an initiative. In order to have anything scaled-up, you need to create the same conditions. The reform must be inside a context. If you take it out of its context, it does not succeed.

Mark explains that the implementation of the BOTs and their performance in Egypt vary widely from one governorate to another. That variation can be justified by the great discrepancies among governorates in their resources and capacities as he explains:

It is different from one governorate to another. But when you talk about Alexandria, you are talking about urban governorate, where there is a huge awareness, and a number of the Boards of Trustees' members are big businessmen in Alexandria. They have large amounts of money that can support education system in Alexandria. So, it was successful. This is not applied to other governorates. If you measure it on a measure from zero to ten, you may have from two to seven for instance.

Sandy stresses the fact that the impact of the BOTs depends to a great extent on their members as the composition of those boards vary widely among schools. Members' education, socio-economic, positions and connections can absolutely influence their contributions and affect their performance.

Lack of Effectiveness

Suzanne suggests that the lack of effectiveness is one of the serious challenges that hinder the successful implementation of the BOTs in Egypt. Though there are various efforts exerted by the BOTs all over the country, those efforts should have a clear direction to ensure their positive impacts on the education sector. For Suzanne:

You have the Boards of Trustees. You have infrastructure for this participation. For each school, you have a Board of Trustees that is supposed to come from the community and from parents. This is, definitely, a good thing. You will find a lot of work done at schools by people. Even at the local level, you will find people donating to schools. There is an interest in supporting the whole system, but it is not directed in the right direction and there is no coordination for these efforts.

Adam indicates that the BOTs are good structures with opportunities to enhance governance and improve participation within the education sector. However, he concludes that reducing their authorities and limiting their roles have resulted in reducing their positive impacts. He explains: "Boards of Trustees are good, but a change happened through taking out some of the responsibilities of these boards which decreased their impact. The system in Egypt is not that institutionalized and this is the case in many developing countries".

Ramzy suggests that controlling and tying the BOTs with a lot of rules and regulations hinder them from implementing their school improvement plans and doing what they should do. He states: "If you are going to tie them with a lot of rules, that is going to prevent them from implementing what they want for their schools".

Lack of Incentives and Monitoring

Peter indicates that the BOTs are supposed to enhance participation in education. However, he suggests the necessity of taking the required measures to activate, empower and encourage them to take their

responsibilities and realize their goals. One of the mechanisms he recommends is the use of incentives, not only financial, but also in their different forms. In Peter's view:

Now you have these platforms that are supposed to enable participation. You need a series of measures to enable them to work which means proper outreach, proper moderation, maybe sometimes also incentives for people to participate. When I talk about incentives, I mean incentives in a broad general way. It does not always have to be related to money. It can be recognition or satisfaction that something, an idea that you provided, is now being implemented.

Sarah criticizes the negative position of the MOE in monitoring the performance of the BOTs and ensure they practise their authorities and take their responsibilities effectively. She raises concerns and doubts about the lack of support required for enhancing the BOTs' performance as well as the knowledge and skills of social workers who are supposed to facilitate the work of the BOTs when she asks:

What is the role of the Ministry of Education? These are the people who are elected, then what? You just leave them? Go and do whatever they want to do? Even social workers who are responsible for the Boards of Trustees, what knowledge and skills they have about this? How much do they know about good governance? How much do they know? What needs to be done and what should be done?

Lack of Awareness

Sarah refers to the lack of awareness from the BOTs' members as one of the biggest challenges facing the effective implementation of those structures. She suggests that the BOTs' members should fully understand their roles, responsibilities and authorities to succeed. She explains:

They need to understand the responsibilities before they nominate themselves to be elected. There are responsibilities they have to take. Maybe the government needs to revisit roles and responsibilities and level of authority given to the Boards of Trustees and whether the individuals who are sitting in those boards are prepared for these roles or not. Are they aware of what is required from them to start with? Do they understand what their roles are? Do they understand what it means to be a member of the board? Does any entity monitor the

performance of the boards? What happens if the board is not really performing or helping the school? If you are elected in the board and you do not perform, and do not show up, what happens? I am taking it back to awareness because those who are not that much educated, you can help them.

Sarah, in response to a question on why she thinks the implementation of the BOTs were successful in Alexandria and are not doing that well in other governorates, stresses the importance of enhancing awareness of the BOTs and local communities when she shares:

There were more awareness campaigns about what they are; what is expected from the communities; schools were open to the communities to go and see; not just to pay money and are not involved. People were well informed about what is happening. There was proper monitoring so on and so forth. When you go to scale, you lose all these things.

III- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs are “interest groups of active individuals outside the governmental framework. They act independently on different issues” (UNDP, 2003, p. 68). The difficulties associated with scaling-up and ensuring sustainability is one of the common obstacles facing the interventions of NGOs in general as they are often local and project-based on a small scale and many of those projects prove to be short-lived. That can be understood in the light of the lack of resources and qualified well-trained capacity (Ulleberg, 2009).

Egypt is described as possessing one of the largest and most vibrant civil society in the developing world (Ministry of International Cooperation, 2016). However, such generalizing statements should be considered carefully and critically, as there are a lot of serious challenges that face NGOs and hinder their work.

Though the history of civil society in Egypt can be traced back to the nineteenth century, they still face serious challenges and severe restrictions. They are not allowed to receive any foreign funds without permission from the Ministry of Social Solidarity. They are not allowed to engage in any political activity unless they are registered as political parties. The Ministry of Social Solidarity has the right to dissolve any NGO that performs illegal operations. In June 2015, the total number of NGOs reached 45,034. The highest percentages of NGOs are located in governorates of

Cairo, Giza and Alexandria; (18%, 10% and 7%, respectively), whereas South Saini has the lowest with a percentage of 0.3%. This can be justified by the population of governorates and the low attention towards establishing NGOs at the frontier governorates (Amin, 2015).

NGOs are presented according to the following sub-themes: Implementers and Service Providers; Suspicion and Strict Control; Capacity Variation; Unsupportive Climate and Bureaucracy; and Foreign Fund Dilemma.

Implementers and Service Providers

Suzanne describes NGOs as powerful implementers with strong and varied experiences and effective outreach mechanisms. However, she stresses that NGOs are totally ignored and avoided by national authorities. Authorities normally look at those organizations with a lot of suspicion and doubts, especially those who receive international funds. Suzanne explains:

NGOs have good experiences at the school-level. They have good experiences with students. They have good experiences with teacher training. There are a lot of teachers' trainings going on by NGOs. Even dealing with students directly for supporting the fees of the school. I think they are not involved. They are out of the picture in a way. But, I think they are ignored. They are totally ignored.

Mary praises the potential huge contributions of NGOs and their capacity to do excellent work at the grassroots level with communities and schools if they are provided with the right supportive atmosphere. She finds that NGOs possess several strengths in certain areas such as awareness campaigns, outreach, resources mobilization, and school construction. She continues:

NGOs can make excellent work, with communities and community schooling. They have already in the past, but the Ministry needs to have oversight. NGOs are very good at raising awareness. They are very good at campaigns. They are very good at helping communities to mobilize resources. They are good at establishing community schools. But these are not good days for NGOs; maybe in the future. NGOs are very important. They are implementers. They are grassroots implementers and they are the closest to people, families, and communities. They have more outreach especially in villages, helmets and areas with poverty.

Sarah confirms that NGOs in Egypt contribute to the education sector in many positive ways. She states that:

NGOs have done lots and lots of very good pilots for education reform; Community Schools is one example. They did a lot of curricula to help children, educate and provide them with life skills. Particularly in non-formal education, they have done a lot of good things. In technical and vocational education, they work with business owners. They can reach communities that the Ministry of Education can not reach because they are on the ground and know how to reach different communities.

Adam describes NGOs as service providers rather than decision-makers within the education sector concluding that certain educational areas need more involvement of NGOs such as the nexus between education and disabilities. Adam clarifies:

We have organizations working on education but mainly they provide services. They are not interested in decision-making and accountability aspects. Currently, some of the organizations start working on accountability and policy-making aspects. During the preparation of Egypt 2030 strategy, the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Education invited a considerable number of civil society representatives to participate in the formulation of this panel. I think there are issues like disabilities that receives no attention from the civil society and so on. Till now, I think, it is very limited.

Suspicion and Strict Control

For long times, NGOs working in Egypt were met with suspicion by national authorities even before the January 25th revolution 2011, and this was especially true for those organizations focusing on political themes such as democratization and political rights. One of the strongest reasons the government deals with NGOs with a lot of suspicion is that some of them have hidden agendas including the spread of extremist thoughts and recruiting new members for extremist groups.

NGOs, working in Egypt, have no friends. That was the way Mary describes the state of suspicion, isolation, neglect and avoidance NGOs face. She states: “NGOs are not the friends of the Ministry of Education. they are not the friends of the Ministry of Social Solidarity. They are nobody’s

friends. They look at them with suspicion, a lot of suspicion even before the revolution”.

Suzanne describes that the Government of Egypt cannot be blamed and has strong justification to deal with NGOs with suspicion as many of them proved to have malignant hidden agendas. She, however, blames the government for not assessing NGOs, understanding their previous experiences, advising and directing them when she says:

I do not blame the government for being suspicious towards NGOs. We have a lot of cases. High percentage of the children come from poor families. Sometimes NGOs are not allowed to get into the schools. Even those implementing projects for donors sometimes are not allowed to enter schools. Definitely, they look at them with suspicion. Sometimes it is justifiable and sometimes it is not. However, there is no a proper assessment of NGOs. What are their previous experiences? They can sit with them, assess them, advise them, and direct them, but this link does not exist.

Sarah presents a similar point of view stating that:

Currently, they are now in a very awkward position particularly with security. During last period, some NGOs were discovered to have political interests that made them on the spot. It is the same as what is facing us as well. Security clearance every step of the way makes it really very difficult.

Mary refers to the issue of "control" that undermines the impact of various efforts of NGOs and prevents them from contributing to the education sector in a more effective way. She indicates that the MOE wants to fully control those organizations and their activities. That can be understood in the light of the suspicion and doubts associated with NGOs. In other words, because the government deals with NGOs with a lot of suspicions and doubts, it puts them under strict control, which impacts negatively their performance. As Mary sees it:

NGOs have two challenges: The Ministry of Education wants to control them completely. So, when they are completely under control, it is frustrating. Number two when they start working with the Ministry, governorate, district, they get caught. That is why it is very

difficult for donors and very difficult for NGOs to work with the Ministry.

Capacity Variation

The NGO sector in Egypt witnesses a wide variation among different NGOs' capacity. Sarah suggests that most NGOs still need a lot of training and get their capacity built. In making this point, Sarah notes:

Capacity of the staff working there, they need a lot of support in this regard. In this sector, you will find few good NGOs at a high level who are familiar with proposals writing and getting funds so on and so forth. Then, you will find the grassroots community associations. This space in the middle is a bit empty. That is what is required and that is what we need. We need to train more NGOs to do better work in education.

Unsupportive Climate and Bureaucracy

In Egypt, the mechanisms of participation by NGOs are weak for several reasons including the restrictive NGO laws; weak NGO infrastructure; and the feeling among the populace that their involvement will have little impact. More efforts need to be done to enhance participation such as decentralizing decision-making and facilitating the roles of the NGOs involved in providing social services (El-Saharty, Richardson and Chase, 2005).

Peter implies that what can be seen on paper is very different from what is observed on the ground. That is because of the lack of supportive climate for such reforms. The government normally blocks a lot of NGOs on purpose because of its suspicion of their agendas. This practice from the Egyptian authorities does not only affect NGOs and their performance, but also international organizations and their initiatives as they rely on NGOs as implementers. As Peter clarifies:

Setting up participative platforms is very nice on paper and is really useful whenever there is an enabling environment for this type of processes to take place. What we observed here in Egypt is that currently the government is not enabling this type of processes. A lot of civil society engagement is blocked. We have some programs which were heavily based on NGOs to implement certain things especially related to outreach to certain communities. We do not know how to reach or have not built trust yet. And we found strong

difficulty to implement these programs because of the current climate we have and the legal framework.

Mary identifies the bureaucracies and complexities within the education sector as main challenges facing different national and international, including the NGOs. They undermine exerted efforts in many ways and are responsible to a great extent for the lack of effectiveness and efficiency within the sector. For Mary:

These are the challenges: The bureaucracies and complexities of the education sector and the fact they need to be controlled. It may take four or five months, for an NGO to get an approval to work with the Ministry of Education. Hopefully, this will be only temporarily.

Foreign Fund Dilemma

NGOs in Egypt are under threat and as a result many organizations reduce their activities, cease operations, or move outside the country. Egypt accuses NGOs of acting as agents for various nefarious actors, which creates a climate of hostility that discourages the pursuit of NGOs' work. The government made it very risky for NGOs to pursue foreign funding, which undermines their ability to maintain staff, continue operations and implement their activities. The government officials often declare that funding approval is an issue of transparency or combating foreign plots (Ruffner, 2015).

Peter mentions that a lot of cooperation between international organizations with NGOs is blocked because of the unsupportive climate controlling NGOs. Sometimes, international organization are not able to pay for NGOs to implement some activities because of the suspicions associated with foreign funds. This means that efforts and initiatives of international organizations are affected directly in a negative way by the challenges facing NGOs.

Peter stresses the importance of political will of the Egyptian authorities in facilitating and supporting such cooperation between international organizations and NGOs. Without that political will, that cooperation cannot work. In Peter's words:

It is difficult to pay a civil society organization to do something because it is foreign funding. On paper, we all know it is very important and it has to be done and that it is useful when carried out. But, first of all, it requires the political will of your partner. If it does

not see it as a priority, then it will be a terminal for us to do it in any way because it will not work.

CONCLUSION

In Egypt, the lack of community participation or the lack of effective participation in the education sector has a lot of interactive factors within a very complex, complicated and demotivating context. Those factors include the lack of trust between the public and government; the high incidence of poverty that makes people more focused on getting and fulfilling their needs; and the lack of awareness and education. It is true there are several positive examples of community participation even from the side of the poor who contribute to enhancing education process and school environment in different ways. However, the participation level is not satisfactory and there is still huge potential for improvement.

Enhancing participation can be seen as one of the top priorities and solutions to be adopted by the government; especially with over-centralization of the education sector and its very tight budget. It is one of the most effective mechanisms to improve education governance by getting communities, families and parents more involved in education and taking more responsibilities in decision-making processes. It is the gateway for increasing and utilizing available resources required by the education sector. To encourage and support effective participation within the education sector, there are a lot that need to be done to enable the context and create a more supportive environment

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations may be considered by stakeholders to enhance participation in the pre-university education Sector. They are presented in two sections: 1) The government of Egypt and 2) The Ministry of Education:

The Government of Egypt

1. Reviewing and redistributing authorities and responsibilities within the pre-university education sector. It is crucial to intensively consult and carefully investigate what authorities and responsibilities are to be delegated or devolved from the central level and to what level.
2. Moving towards a more decentralized education sector supported by the highest level of political leadership, commitment and will.

Achieving decentralization is a mutual responsibility that requires strong political commitment, will and collaboration among different national organizations including the Presidency, the Cabinet, MOF, the Ministry of Local Development, the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the MOE. It has been demonstrated on the ground that the current rigid bureaucratic management education system is unable to manage efficiently and effectively that huge sector.

3. Implementing financial decentralization as a key step for moving towards actual education decentralization. It requires a direct intervention and support from the MOF. Without financial decentralization, there will be no real decentralization within the education sector as finance always controls the decision-making processes.
4. Enhancing awareness of the public and local communities regarding the importance of education and the possible ways they can contribute to the education sector. That can enhance the level of community participation in the education sector.
5. Attracting, encouraging and empowering NGOs to contribute more effectively to the pre-university education sector.
6. Reducing security procedures and barriers imposed on NGOs considering NGOs as real partners and powerful implementers to maximize their contributions to the education sector.

The Ministry of Education

1. Encouraging and supporting participation of local communities to maximize their contributions to the education sector, allow them to take part in monitoring, evaluation, decision-making and management processes.
2. Reviewing responsibilities, authorities and roles of the BOTs to maximize their impact on the education sector, its governance and management and decision-making processes in a more effective way.
3. Empowering and enhancing the performance of BOTs at all levels. The BOTs, especially at the school level, can have a very positive and direct impact on enhancing school environment and learning/teaching processes.
4. Providing effective training programs and building capacity of the BOTs. Once recruited, BOTs' members should be trained and supported to ensure their effective inputs and participation.

5. Encouraging and attracting well-qualified and enthusiastic members to the BOTs.
6. Rebuilding strong relationships of coordination, consultation and trust with NGOs. Cooperating with NGOs as real partners and effective contributors to the education sector would facilitate, enhance and maximize their roles, responsibilities and contributions.

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